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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Next Century Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[8 March 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Albinos in East Africa: prompting discussion for a hopeful future

Mr President, the Next Century Foundation wishes to draw attention to the current situation of those with Albinism in East Africa, especially in the United Republic of Tanzania. Those living with Albinism in this region may spend their lives ostracised from their communities, living in fear of violence and battling the health concerns and issues that arise as a result of the condition they are born with. The experience of those with Albinism is one of discrimination based on colour.

Tanzania has a higher rate of people born with Albinism than its neighbouring nations. In Tanzania's communities there are differing, and sometimes dangerous, views of Albino peoples. Witch doctors proliferate the idea that Albino skin and body parts have magical or mystical properties relating to prosperity and good luck. This has resulted in a great degree of violence, such as the mutilation or murder of these people and even the vandalising of graves as body parts with these so-called magical properties are sought out. It is a lucrative market. In 2015, the UN itself reported that there had been 75 murders of Albinos in Tanzania from the year 2000 but also acknowledged that this is most likely not reflective of the true number. Conversely, other superstitious views see Albinism as a sign of bad luck or a curse thus also rendering those with Albinism vulnerable to risk and violence. Violence is not the only issue faced by Albino peoples. There is great misunderstanding concerning the condition and this leads to social exclusion by communities and even families with infanticide and child abandonment not being uncommon. Families too face the same exclusion if they choose to protect members with the condition.

In Tanzania, 90% of those with the condition will die before they are 40 years old. Affected eyesight and eye damage alongside hair loss are two issues. However, it is skin cancer that presents a truly huge problem for those with Albinism. Due to the lack of understanding about the condition, continuous and unprotected exposure means that skin cancer is rampant. Sun-cream is not a common or affordable commodity across Tanzania and it is something as simple as this product that could make a real difference.

The NCF expresses its support and praise to the organisations and governments who have spoken out against the superstitious views and violence against Albino peoples and those who have made efforts to alleviate the suffering of those with Albinism through education and relief. Whether that be Tanzania's president condemning witch doctors, the sun cream organisation Kilimanjaro Suncare in Tanzania that provides carefully formulated sunscreen products for those with Albinism amongst other initiatives or international organisations such as the Global Medical Relief Fund that have produced prosthetic limbs for Albino victims.

However, we now call upon the UN and international community to raise further awareness of these issues by raising the profile of such discussion. The human rights violations of Albino peoples often fails to gain the attention it needs. We also wish to see support for international organisations and in-country efforts to educate, provide relief and breakdown stigmas concerning those with Albinism.